STEREO FIDELITY

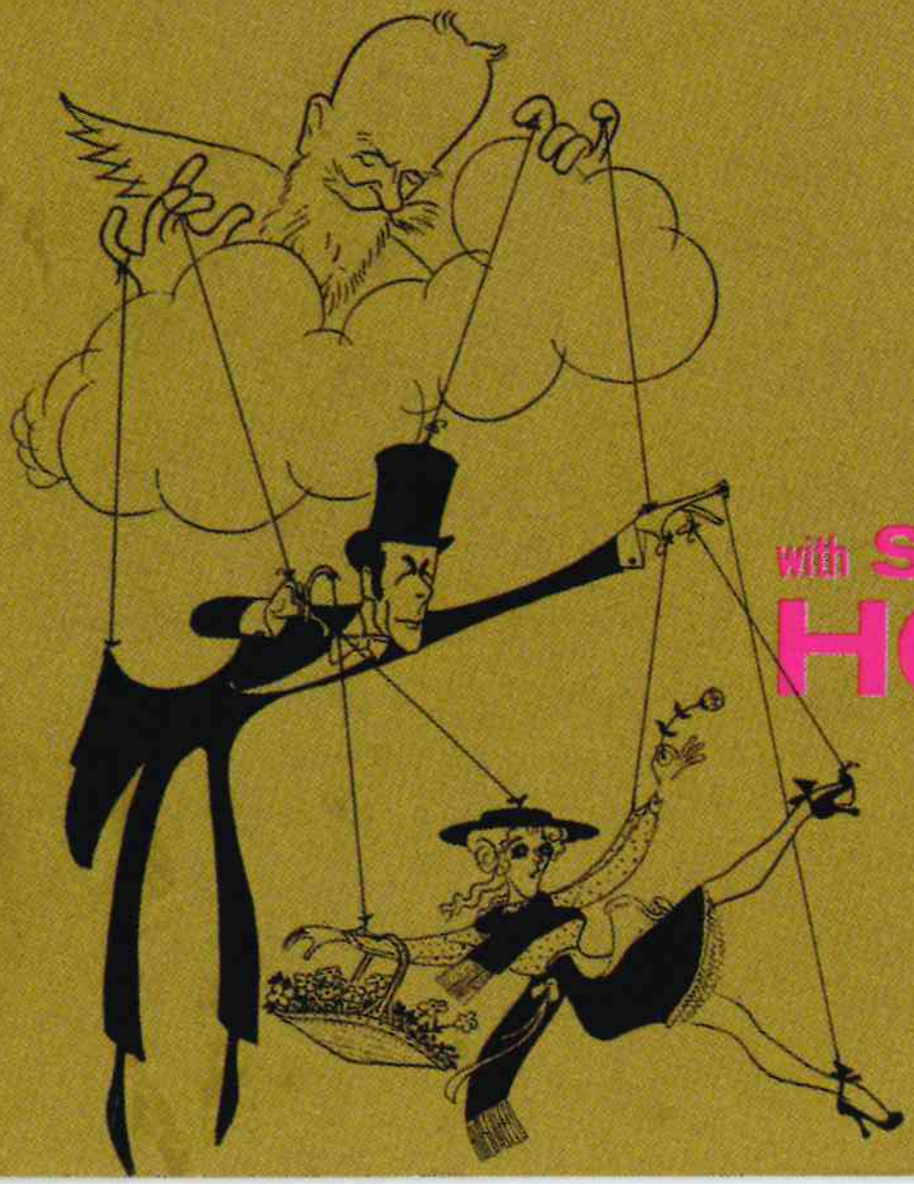
COLUMBIA BROADWAY MASTERWORKS

Herman Levin presents

REX HARRISON
JULIE ANDREWS
MY FAIR LADY

ORIGINAL CAST

adapted from Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion"



book and lyrics by: **Alan Jay Lerner**
music by: **Frederick Loewe**
production staged by: **Moss Hart**

choreography and musical numbers by: **Hanya Holm**
production designed by: **Oliver Smith**
costumes designed by: **Cecil Beaton**

musical director/Cyril Ornadel
orchestrations/Robert Russell Bennett and Phil Lang
dance music arrangements/Trude Rittman
lighting/Joe Davis

with **STANLEY HOLLOWAY**

Robert Coote
Leonard Weir
Bob Chisholm

produced for records by Goddard Lieberson

recorded in London, February 1, 1959

Herman Levin presents

REX HARRISON
JULIE ANDREWS

in America's greatest musical

MY FAIR LADY

adapted from George Bernard Shaw's "Pygmalion"

wit

STANLEY HOLLOWA

Robert Coot

Leonard Weir, Alan Dudley, Bob Chisholm, Betty Woolf

Book and lyrics: **Alan Jay Lerne**

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Musical direction: **Cyril Ornadel**

Musical arrangements: **Robert Russell Bennett and Phil Lang**

Dance music arranged by **Trude Rittman**

CAST

Henry Higgins	REX HARRISON
Eliza Doolittle	JULIE ANDREWS
Alfred P. Doolittle	STANLEY HOLLOWAY
Colonel Pickering	Robert Coote
Bartender	Bob Chisholm
Mrs. Higgins	Zena Dare
Harry	Alan Dudley
Mrs. Pearce	Betty Woolfe
Freddy Eynsford-Hill	Leonard Weir

MUSICAL NUMBERS

Act I

1. Overture . . . . . Orchestra
2. Why Can't The English? . . . . . Rex Harrison
   Robert Coote
3. Wouldn't It Be Loverly . . . . . Julie Andrews
   Ensemble
4. With A Little Bit Of Luck. . . . . Stanley Holloway
   Alan Dudley
   Bob Chisholm
   Zena Dare
   Ensemble
5. I'm An Ordinary Man . . . . . Rex Harrison
6. Just You Wait . . . . . Julie Andrews
7. The Rain In Spain . . . . . Rex Harrison
   Julie Andrews
   Robert Coote
   Ensemble
8. I Could Have Danced All Night . . . . . Julie Andrews
   Betty Woolfe
   Maids
9. Ascot Gavotte . . . . . Ensemble
10. On The Street Where You Live . . . . . Leonard Weir

Act II

11. You Did It . . . . . Robert Coote
Rex Harrison
Betty Woolfe
Ensemble
12. Show Me . . . . . Julie Andrews
Leonard Weir
13. Get Me To The Church On Time . . . . . Stanley Holloway
Ensemble
14. A Hymn To Him . . . . . Rex Harrison
15. Without You . . . . . Julie Andrews
16. I've Grown Accustomed To Her Face . . . . . Rex Harrison

CD bonus track

17. The Embassy Waltz . . . . . Orchestra
Conducted by Percy Faith

Opened April 30, 1958 at the Drury Lane Theatre (2,281 performances).

THE REVIEWS, on the morning of March 16, 1956, were positively ecstatic. Every theatre critic in town had evidently been scrambling to find new adjectives to describe the wondrous musical that had opened the night before. "*My Fair Lady* is a distinguished and delightful comedy, beautifully acted, and it demonstrated again how wonderful the stage can be when everything is going along as it should," wrote Richard Watts in the *New York Post*, while Robert Coleman in the *Daily Mirror* rhapsodized, "*My Fair Lady* is a felicitous blend of intellect, wit, rhyme and high spirits. A masterpiece of musical legerdemain... A terrific show!"

"Don't bother to finish reading this review now. You'd better sit right down and send for those tickets to *My Fair Lady*," warned Walter Kerr in the *Herald Tribune*; and Brooks Atkinson, in *The New York Times* simply commented, "*My Fair Lady* is... one of Broadway's celestial works."

In retrospect, it seems almost easy to understand the critics' reaction, for here was a show that, for all intents and purposes, was a landmark in the theatre, and would eventually be considered by many historians as the most perfect example of the American musical as an art form.

Using George Bernard Shaw's witty "Pygmalion", in a bright and clever adaptation by Alan Jay Lerner, *My Fair Lady* gloriously incorporated the play and the score in a seamless confection, enabling the former to get a new lease on life from the latter, which in turn helped the action move along with greater spontaneity and charm. As Keith Garebian observed in his fascinating study about the making of the show, "*My Fair Lady* was a phenomenon that elevated musical theatre to a rare level of polished literate entertainment."

Audiences agreed and helped ensure that, following its premiere at the Mark Hellinger Theatre, the show would enjoy a run of 2,717 performances its first time around, making it for a while the longest-running musical in Broadway's history, a record it held until *Fiddler On The Roof* broke it in 1968.

Its other achievements may seem less impressive today, particularly when compared with the mega-productions that

PORTRAIT GALLERY: A British Broadway Triumph

Julie Andrews and Rex Harrison John Springer/Corbis-Bettmann

SOME entertainments — usually musicals—exert a lasting attraction which far exceeds ordinary

for "My Fair Lady" he has evidently surpassed himself. They were described with delight, in THE SUNDAY

hall tradition; he plays the "immoral moralist," Doolittle the dustman, with the gusty earthiness and good humour

Eliza Doolittle- Julie Andrews and Henry Higgins- Rex Harrison
John Springer/Corbis-Bettmann

have opened on Broadway since, but it is interesting to note that, in December, 1958, it also established an all-time record for gross receipts when it passed the $10-million mark, leaving behind a previous record held by *South Pacific*.

One of the most unusual aspects about its production was the fact that, in a rare display of corporate sponsorship unheard of in the annals of both Broadway and the recording industry at the time, it was entirely financed by Columbia Records, at the urging of Goddard Lieberson, head of the label's A&R department and a close friend of Alan Jay Lerner. In exchange, the label obtained the perpetuity recording rights, which eventually led to not one but two cast albums with virtually the same participants — the 1956 Broadway version, which was in mono, the prevailing format at the time, and the 1958 London production, which was recorded in the then-new two-channel or stereo system.

A variation of the Pygmalion and Galathea legend, in which a sculptor falls in love with a statue he has created, *My Fair Lady* dealt with an eminent professor of phonetics, Henry Higgins, who, on a wager with his friend, Col. Pickering, suggests to a simple flower girl, Eliza Doolittle, that he can teach her the proper way of speaking and pass her off as a lady ("Why Can't The English?").

At first uncertain about what this offer might mean to her, Eliza warms up to the idea and flirts lightly with it ("Wouldn't It Be Loverly"), while not far from there, her father, Alfred P. Doolittle, a *bon vivant* and sometimes philosopher, spends another joyous bachelor evening in a local pub, in the company of some of his cronies ("With A Little Bit Of Luck").

The following morning, Eliza shows up at Higgins' home, but her Cockney mannerisms and moralities become so exasperating to him that he nearly abandons the idea ("I'm An Ordinary Man"). She, in turn, is quickly driven to distraction by his thoughtless treatment and incessant coaxing ("Just You Wait"), despite Pickering's admonitions to Higgins to treat her more humanly and not just as the object of an experiment. After weeks of grueling drillings, Eliza finally manages to learn the proper way to enunciate ("The Rain In Spain"); overwhelmed, Higgins and Pickering lead her into an exuberant celebration.

Later that night, Eliza is still too exhilarated to go to sleep, despite the urgent calls of Mrs. Pearce, Higgins' housekeeper, that she should be in bed ("I Could Have Danced All Night").

Soon after, Higgins decides it is time to introduce his protegee to society; he brings her to the Ascot Races, where she attracts the attentions of Freddy Eynsford-Hill, a young socialite, who becomes infatuated with her ("On The Street Where You Live").

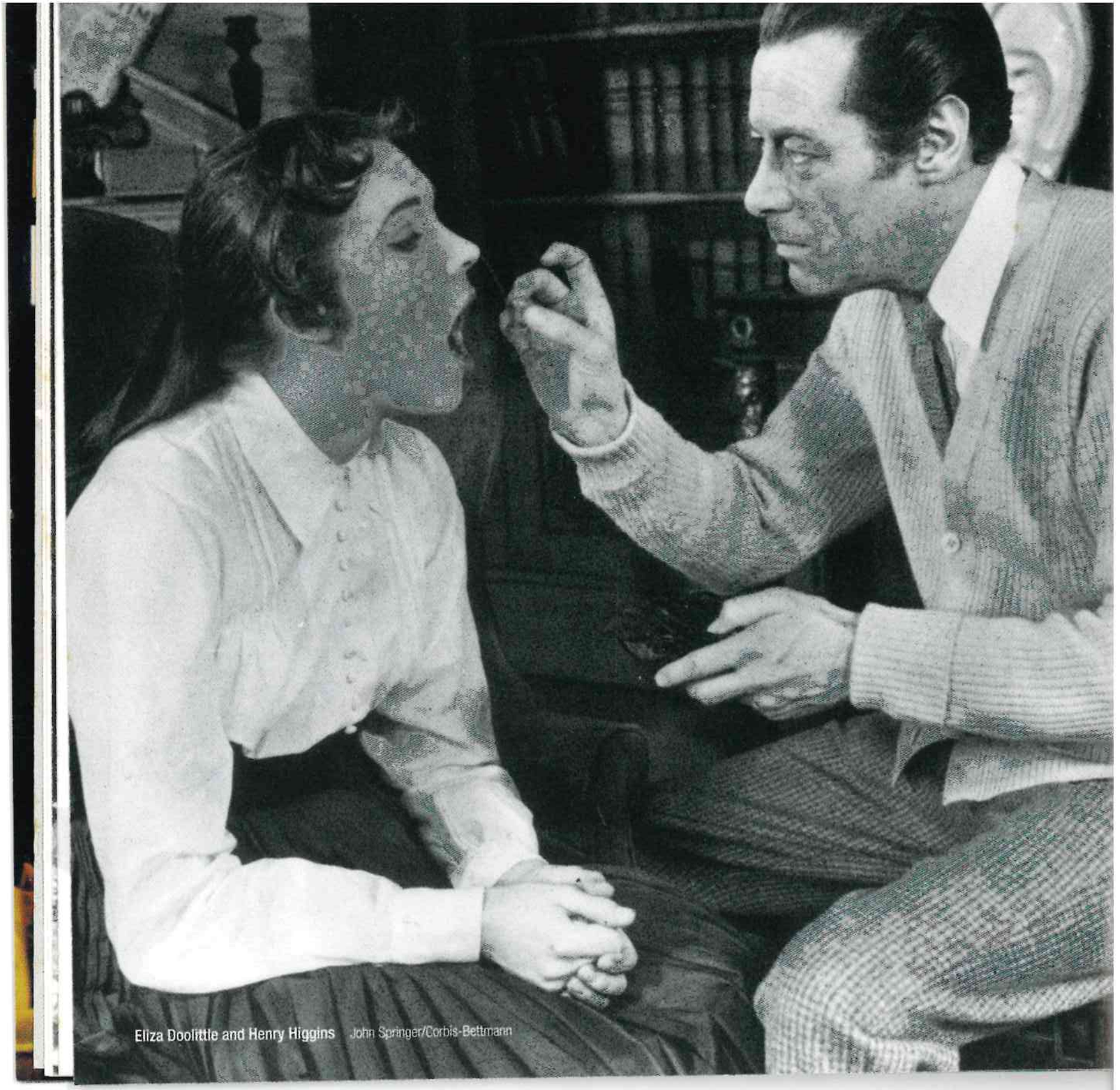
But it takes several more months of hard work before Higgins feels confident enough for the big moment — that of taking Eliza to the Embassy ball attended by the cream of British society. Eliza succeeds beyond everyone's expectations and is at once thought to be a foreign princess.

Back from the ball, Higgins and Pickering congratulate each other for their brilliant mystification ("You Did It"), totally oblivious of Eliza and her own feelings. Hurt and angry, she rushes out of the house, only to run into Freddy who seizes the opportunity to profess his love. But Eliza brushes him aside ("Show Me").

In the meantime, Alfred P. Doolittle has a change of mind about his own situation, and decides that it is time he should marry the woman with whom he has been living for years. But not before he has spent a last night of revelry on the town ("Get Me To The Church On Time").

The following morning, Higgins discovers to his amazement that Eliza has flown the coop, and philosophically comments to Pickering about the inconsistencies in women ("A Hymn To Him"). Eventually, he finds Eliza at his mother's home, where she has gone for warmth and sympathy, but she rejects his lame offers of truce ("Without You"), and snappily says she might marry Freddy. On his way back to his own house, Higgins suddenly realizes how much she has affected his own life, and how important she has become to him ("I've Grown Accustomed To Her Face"). He is sitting at home, listening to the recordings of her voice, when she quietly enters the room. Smugly, Higgins slumps himself into an armchair, brings his hat down over his eyes, and simply says, with a triumphantly sarcastic tone, "Eliza, where the devil are my slippers?" as the curtain falls.

Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins Culver Pictures



Eliza Doolittle and Henry Higgins John Springer/Corbis-Bettmann

Turning Shaw's bittersweet drawing-room comedy into a Broadway musical proved quite a challenge for Alan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe, who initially agreed to do it in 1952 at the suggestion of film producer Gabriel Pascal (unaware of the fact that Noel Coward, Cole Porter, Howard Dietz and Arthur Schwartz, and Rodgers and Hammerstein, among others, had already turned down the idea, primarily on the grounds that Shaw's play was too perfect to temper with). "We worked on it for six months and then decided it was impossible," wrote Lerner in "The Musical Theatre: A Celebration" (McGraw Hill, 1986). "In 1954, we picked it up again, and this time we stayed with it to completion... What *was* essential was that every song and every addition to the play not violate the wit and intelligence of Shaw's work."

Lerner and Loewe succeeded beyond anyone's wildest dreams: by remaining true to the play, they actually improved on it, and wrote a perfect musical. As Keith Garebian noted, "In all three crucial parts of its structure — beginning, middle, end — *My Fair Lady* is extraordinarily precise, pointed and peerless."

In bringing their project to theatrical life, they, and director Moss Hart, were also magnificently helped by a particularly winning cast: as Higgins, Rex Harrison, a stage and screen favorite for years, defined the arrogant charm that was the very essence of the character he portrayed. "Originally, I had a block about appearing in a musical," Harrison, a non-singer, confided in a *New York Times* interview. "I went to a voice teacher for a while, but that did no good. My range is about one-and-a-half notes. I ended up talking the musical numbers, which was revolutionary at the time."

In the crucial role of Eliza, the creators cast a 19-year-old ingenue, Julie Andrews, fresh from her triumphant debut in the Broadway hit, *The Boy Friend*. "From the moment she set foot on stage, one could see she fairly radiated with some indefinable substance that is the difference between talent and star," wrote Alan Jay Lerner, to describe his own reaction to Andrews' performance.

They also chose Stanley Holloway, a noted British music hall star, to portray Alfred P. Doolittle, Eliza's father whose own brand of philosophy is not that far

removed from Higgins' chauvinism, and Robert Coote, a close friend of Rex Harrison, as Pickering.

If Broadway had been ecstatic over *My Fair Lady*, it was nothing compared with the way the show was greeted in London. As soon as H.M. Tennent Limited unveiled plans to bring the production to the Drury Lane Theatre, the usually reserved British, aware that they were reclaiming a property they truthfully felt belonged to them, reacted with unbridled enthusiasm. Kitty Carlisle, wife of Moss Hart, who had staged the show on Broadway and would repeat the assignment in London, said that "They felt that it was Shaw and Eliza Doolittle coming home." The furor was such that an evening newspaper ran a frontpage countdown to opening night. The premiere, with the formal audience, in tuxedos and glamorous gowns, giving a standing ovation to the show and eight curtain calls, was "more like a Coronation," according to Alan Jay Lerner who described the experience as "far too overwhelming for any man, especially an author, to absorb."

Three nights after the premiere, on April 30, 1958, the Queen and Prince Philip attended a Royal Command Performance, giving the production extra luster... and added publicity. Not that it needed it: the London scribes had already been as rhapsodious as their counterparts on the other side of the Atlantic. "One can only hazard a guess as to what the unpredictable Shaw might have thought of this musical adaptation of his play," summed up *The Theatre World Annual*, "but one is fairly confident in affirming that the strictest purist would fall under the spell of *My Fair Lady*, without doubt astonished at the show's elegant charm, tastefulness and sincerity. He might even have a sneaking suspicion that these Americans — aided by a splendid team of English actors and actresses — have improved on the great master."

The show's initial run almost equalled the longevity of the Broadway production, with 2,281 performances, almost unheard-of in the annals of the London theatre at that time.

While virtually the same principals were reunited for this production, there were

Rex Harrison original album art

Julie Andrews original album art

minor differences that made it more typically homegrown. Its music director was Cyril Ornadel, a very well-known conductor and composer in his own right, who gave the musical numbers a breezier tempo than they had had on Broadway. Cast changes included Zena Dare as Mrs. Higgins, Leonard Weir as Freddy, Bob Chisholm as the Bartender, Alan Dudley as Harry, and Betty Woolfe as Mrs. Pearce, among others.

More significantly, however, there were differences in the performances — while Rex Harrison sounded more snappy than he had been on Broadway, Julie Andrews had to brush up her Cockney and "put back the heavy accent that I had had to tone down for the New York audiences."

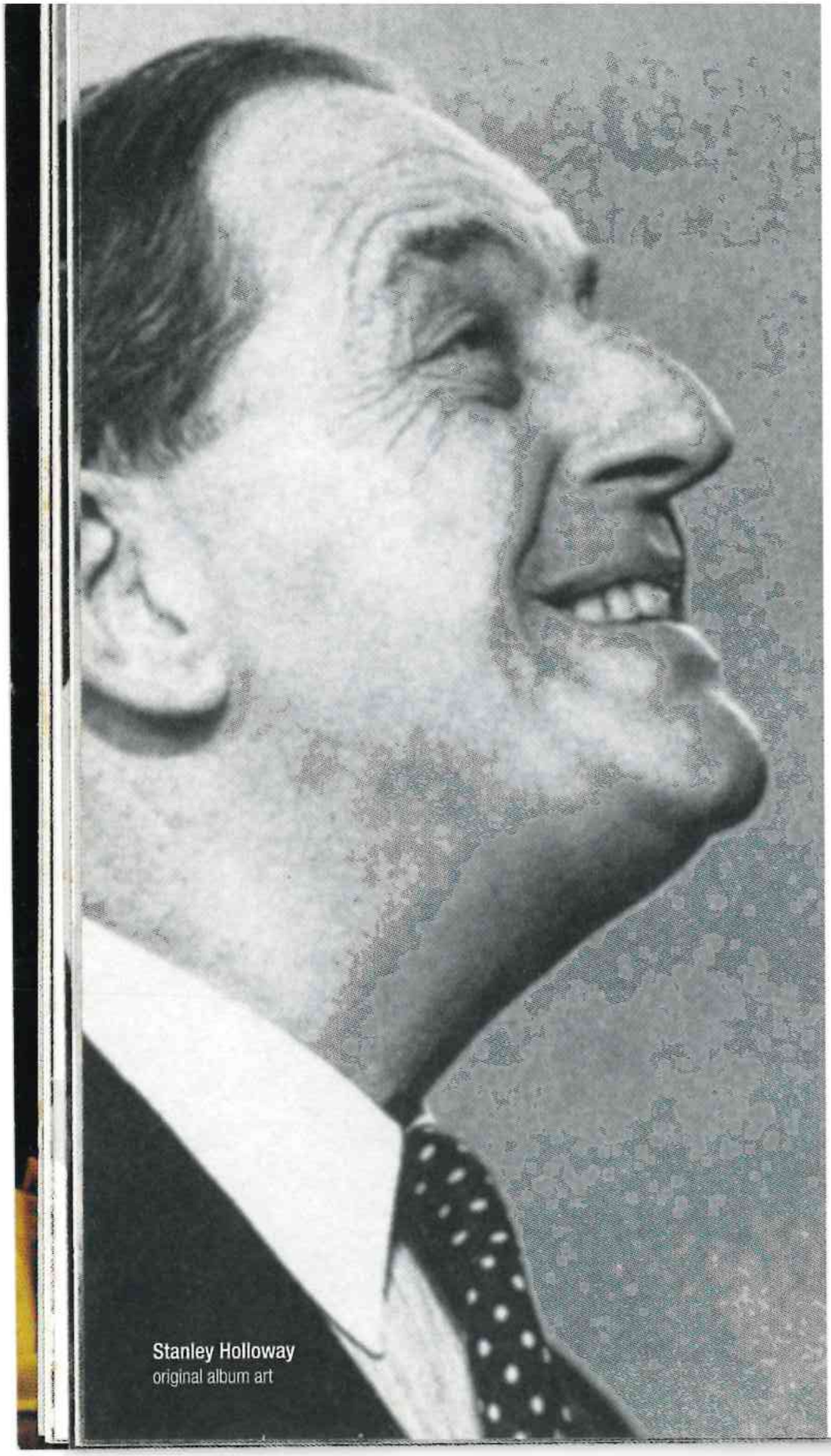
For his part, Stanley Holloway was obviously relishing the idea of playing to an audience that was more familiar with his own brand of talent, and his characterization became broader, more assured as a result.

While the London cast recording reflects all these minor differences when compared with the 1956 Broadway version, both are strikingly similar in many other ways, one of them being the absence of one of the show's highlights, the brilliant waltz composed by Frederick Loewe for the Embassy ball. To complement this reissue of the cast album, it was decided to include as a bonus track Percy Faith's own recording of the waltz, which, while in mono, will provide the listener with an opportunity to discover it in all its glorious musical splendor.

Today, *My Fair Lady* continues to enjoy a popularity almost unequalled in the annals of the musical theatre. It has been performed in one form or another almost everywhere in the world, and has been successfully revived on Broadway on three different occasions.

A splendid amalgam of comedy and songs which, put together, spell Broadway at its most creative, it still stands as the epitome of the American musical at its very best.

—Didier C. Deutsch



Stanley Holloway
original album art

Original Producer: Goddard Lieberson

Recorded February 1, 1959
in London, England

Original album: OS 2015
released 3/23/59

track #17
Recorded April 17, 1956
at CBS 30th Street Studios
Produced by Irving Townsend

CD Reissue Producer: Thomas Frost
Reissue Engineer: Charles Harbutt
Product Manager: Joy Gilbert
Design: Jennifer Harenberg

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Eliza and Henry Culver Pictures

RECORDED IN LONDON FEBRUARY 1, 1959

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MY FAIR LADY
IN STEREO

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